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ABSTRACT

The push toward decentralization raises questions about the composition and areas of responsibility of site-based decision-making bodies. This bulletin answers these questions by examining data available from the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). All states reported having some site-based decision-making bodies in local schools. The majority of site-based decision-making bodies included principals, teachers, and parents. Finally, site-based decision-making bodies frequently considered issues pertaining to curriculum and student discipline. Three figures are included. (LMI)

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ISSUE BRIEF

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ISSUE BRIEF

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Educational reforms have often called for decentralizing decisionmaking authority to the school site (e.g., Chubb and Moe 1990). It has been argued that site-based decisionmaking allows schools to better serve their students, since administrators and teachers are empowered to respond in a coordinated manner to student needs (e.g., Holman 1995). In addition, site-based decisionmaking may provide opportunities for teachers, parents, students, and community representatives to gain new skills as they work together to improve their schools.

The push towards decentralization also raises questions about the composition and areas of responsibility of site-based decisionmaking bodies. What percentages of these groups include teachers? parents? What school policy areas do site-based decisionmaking bodies consider? Data available from the 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), can be used to address these questions. In this survey, public school respondents indicated whether their schools had decisionmaking bodies other than school boards, student councils, parent/teacher associations, or parent/teacher organizations. Respondents also indicated who served on these decisionmaking bodies and what functions they performed. These data make it possible to determine the prevalence, composition, and selected functions of site-based decisionmaking bodies in public schools.

All states reported having some site-based decisionmaking bodies in local schools.

In 1993–94, an average of 56 percent of public schools in the United States had a site-based decisionmaking body in place (figure 1). In about half of the states, these groups were present in over 50 percent of schools. Across all states, the percentages of schools with a site-based decisionmaking body ranged from about 22 percent in Nebraska to approximately 86 percent in West Virginia. State variation in the percentages of schools having site-based decisionmaking bodies may be related to legislative reforms that encourage the development of such groups. In Texas, for example, legislation was passed in 1991 requiring each district in the state to implement a plan for site-based decisionmaking (Lutz and Iden 1994). In Illinois, the Chicago School Reform Act, passed by the state legislature in 1988, included a component that called for the establishment of elected local school councils at each school site in the city (Hess 1994). Federal programs, such as Title 1, also may play a role in promoting site-based decisionmaking by requiring schools to establish school-based advisory groups.

Figure 1. Percentage of public schools that reported having a site-based decisionmaking body, by state: 1993–94

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (Public School Questionnaire).

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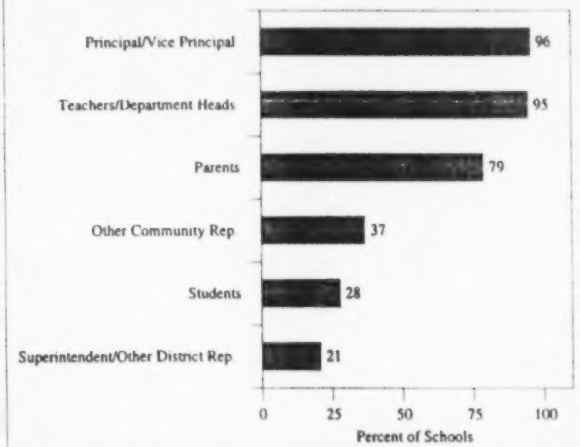
The majority of site-based decisionmaking bodies included principals, teachers, and parents.

In 1993–94, 96 percent of schools with site-based decisionmaking bodies included the school principal or vice principal, and 95 percent included teachers or department heads (figure 2). To a lesser but still considerable extent, parents were involved in these groups in 1993–94; 79 percent of site-based decisionmaking bodies included parents. Students were represented in these groups less frequently than were the principal, teachers, or parents; only 28 percent of schools with site-based decisionmaking bodies reported student involvement.

Figure 2. Percentage of public schools whose site-based decisionmaking bodies were composed of various individuals or groups: 1993–94



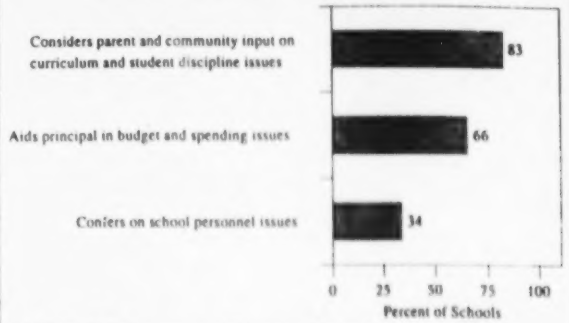
NOTE: "Teachers/Department Heads" includes department heads and three categories of teachers: those who are elected, volunteer, or are picked by the principal. "Parents" includes parents who volunteer or are picked by the principal. "Students" includes students who are elected or are picked by faculty or the principal.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (Public School Questionnaire).

Site-based decisionmaking bodies frequently considered issues pertaining to curriculum and student discipline.

In 1993–94, 83 percent of public schools that had site-based decisionmaking bodies reported that these groups considered parent and community input on curriculum and student discipline issues as one of their functions (figure 3). In the same year, two-thirds of these bodies aided the principal in school budget and spending issues, and one-third conferred on school personnel issues.

Figure 3. Percentage of public schools reporting selected functions of their site-based decisionmaking bodies: 1993–94



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey (Public School Questionnaire).

Discussion

In 1993–94, site-based decisionmaking bodies were present in at least some public schools in all states. Made up primarily of administrators, teachers, and parents, the majority of these groups considered issues that included curriculum, student discipline, and budgeting.

The findings from this brief can be expanded using SASS data. For example, it is possible to examine whether teachers feel more or less empowered to influence school policy and classroom practice in schools with site-based decisionmaking groups. Also, since site-based management may work best in schools where professional development is a high priority (Wohlstetter 1995), SASS can be used to estimate the percentages of teachers and principals in schools with site-based decisionmaking bodies who participate in professional development or in-service training programs. Other issues to be addressed go beyond the SASS data and include the nature and extent of decisionmaking authority given to these groups and the sense of empowerment experienced by parents.

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Issue Briefs present information on education topics of current interest. All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error. For additional details on SASS data collection methods and definitions, see the following U.S. Department of Education publications: *1993–94 Schools and Staffing Survey: Sample Design and Estimation* (NCES 96–089) and *Quality Profile for SASS: Aspects of the Quality of Data in the Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS)* (NCES 94–340).

This **Issue Brief** was prepared by Shannon Daugherty and Robert Rossi, American Institutes for Research. To obtain standard errors or definitions of terms for this **Issue Brief**, or to obtain additional information about the Schools and Staffing Survey, contact Charles H. Hammer (202) 219–1330. To order additional copies of this **Issue Brief** or other NCES publications, call 1–800–424–1616. NCES publications are available on the Internet at http://www.ed.gov/NCES.

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